

THE SPECTRE OF THE REAL

BY THOS HARDY.

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CHAPTER IV.
In August this pair of disappointed people met once more amid their old surroundings. Perhaps their enforced absence from one another gave at first some zest to their reunion. Jim was at times tender, and like his former self; Rosalys, if sad and subdued, less sullen and reproachful than she had been in London.

ing to leave you, when you hear what I mean. My ideas have grown considerably emancipated of late, and therefore I tell you there is no reason on earth why any soul should ever know of that miserable mistake we made in the spring.

Mrs. Ambrose had fallen into delicate health, and her daughter was, in consequence, able to dispose of her time outside the house as she wished. The moonlight meetings with Jim were discontinued; but husband and wife went for long strolls sometimes in the remote nooks of the park, through winding walks in the distant shrubberies, and down paths hidden by high yew hedges from intruding eyes that might look with suspicion on their being together.

"I'll try to emancipate myself likewise," she said, slowly. "I will not forget this tragedy of our lives! And the most tragic part of it is—that we are not even sorry that we don't love each other any more!"



HUSBAND AND WIFE WENT FOR LONG STROLLS.

others deep bags, in the middle of which a large yellow insect remained motionless and watchful. "Shall we sit for a little while in the summer house?" said Rosalys at last, in flat accents, for a tete-a-tete with Jim had long ceased to give her any really strong beats of pleasure. "I want to talk to you further about plans; how often we had better write, and so on."

"And yours." She hastened on down the grass walk into the broad gravelled path leading to the house. At the corner stood Mrs. Ambrose, who was better, and had come out for a stroll—as an invalid assuming the privilege of wearing a singular scarlet gown, and a hat in which a number of black quills stood startlingly erect.

"You might have found a more lively scene for what will be, perhaps, our last interview for years," Jim went on. "Are you really going so soon?" she asked, passing over the complaint.

"Yes, Mr. Durrant and I have been having a furious political discussion, mamma. I have grown quite hot over it. He is more unreasonable than ever. But when he gets abroad he won't be as he is now. A few years of India will change all that." And to carry on the idea of her unconcern she turned to whistle to a bold robin that had fitted down from a larch tree, perched on the yew hedge, and looked inquiringly at her, answering her whistle with his pathetic little pipe.

"I suppose so," she answered, absent ly looking out under the log roof at a chaffinch swinging himself backwards and forwards on a large bough. A sort of dreary indifference to her surroundings; a sense of being caged and trapped had begun to take possession of Rosalys. The present was full of perplexity, the future objectless. Now and then, when she looked at Jim's thin figure and healthy, virile face, she felt that perhaps she might have been able to love him still if only he had cared for her with a remnant of his former passionate devotion. But his indifference was even more palpable than her own. They sat and talked on within the dim arbor for a little while. Then Jim made one of the unfortunate remarks that always galled her to the quick. She rose in anger, answered him with cold sarcasm and hastened away down the little wood. He followed her, a rather ominous light shining in his eyes.

"How dare you!" said the girl. "For God's sake leave me, and don't come back again! I rejoice to think that in a few days it will not be in your power to insult me any more!"

Ambrose had determined to act upon the hint Jim had thrown out to her as to the practical utility of their marriage contract, if they simply left in different hemispheres without a word. She had never written to him since; and he had never written a line to her. He might be dead for all that she knew; he possibly was dead. She had taken no steps to ascertain anything about him, though she had been aware for years that he was no longer in the army list. Dead or alive he was completely cut off from the country in which he and she had lived, for his father had died a long time before this, and his house and properties had been sold, and not a scion of the house of Durrant remained in that part of England.

Rosalys had readily imbibed his ideas of their mutual independence; and now, after the lapse of all these years, had acted upon them with the surprising literalness of her sex when they act upon advice at all.

Mrs. Ambrose, who had distinguished herself in no way during her fifty years of life save by the fact of having brought a singularly beautiful girl into the world, had passed quietly out of it. Rosalys' aims had succeeded of their own accord in the possession of the old house with its red tower, and the broad paths and garden lands; he had followed by an unsatisfactory son of his, last in the entail, and thus unexpectedly Rosalys Ambrose found herself sole mistress of the spot of her birth.

People marveled somewhat that she called herself Miss Ambrose still. Though a woman now getting on for thirty she was distinctly attractive both in face and in figure, and could confront the sunlight as well as the moonbeams still. In the manner of women who are still sure of their charms, she was fond of representing herself as younger than she really was. Perhaps she would have been disappointed if her friends had not laughed and contradicted her, and told her that she was still lovely and looked like a girl. Lord Parkhurst, anyhow, was firmly of that contradictory opinion; and perhaps she cared more for his views than for anyone else's at the present time.

That distinguished sailor had been but one of many suitors; but he had stirred her heart as none of the others could do. It was not merely that he was brave and pleasing, and had returned from a campaign in Egypt with a hero's reputation; but that his chivalrous feelings towards women, originating perhaps in the fact that he knew very little about them, were sufficient to gratify the most exacting of the sex.

His rigid notions of duty and honor, both towards them and from them, made the blood of Rosalys run cold when she thought of a certain little episode of her past life, notwithstanding that, or perhaps because, she loved him dearly.

"He is not the least bit of a flirt, like most sailors," said Miss Ambrose to her cousin and companion, Miss Jennings, on a particular afternoon in this eighth year of Jim Durrant's obliteration from her life. It was an afternoon with an immense event immediately ahead of it; no less an event than Rosalys' marriage with Lord Parkhurst, which was to take place on the very next day.

The local newspaper had duly announced the coming wedding in proper terms as "the approaching nuptials of the beautiful and wealthy Miss Ambrose, of Ambrose Towers, with a distinguished naval officer, Lord Parkhurst." There followed an ornamental account of the future bridegroom's heroic conduct during the late war.

"The handsome face and figure of Lord Parkhurst," wound up the honest paragraphist, "are not altogether unknown to us in this vicinity, as he has recently been visiting his uncle, Col. Lucy, high sheriff of the county. We wish all prosperity to the happy couple, who have doubtless a brilliant and cloudless future before them."

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M'KENNA'S FLIRTATION

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